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Smoking on Home Oxygen Causes Hadley Fatal Fire

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan and Hadley Fire Chief James E. Kicza said the investigation into the November 23, 2008 fatal fire at 208 Russell Street in Hadley has found the most probable cause of the fire was smoking on home oxygen. Northwestern District Attorney Elizabeth Scheibel's office confirmed the name of the fire victim was Susan M. Nevin, a 54-year old woman, who was in Room 114 of the Norwottuck Inn.

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan said, "Smoking on home oxygen is not a private matter but a serious threat to public safety. Oxygen will soak into furniture, clothes, bedding, facial hair and other materials, making them catch fire more easily." He added, "Since 1997, there have been 22 deaths and over 33 serious injuries in Massachusetts from fires and burns started by smoking while home oxygen was in use."

Chief Kicza said, "While our deepest sympathies go to the family of the fire victim, we are lucky that no one else at the Norwottuck Inn and no firefighters were injured." He added, "Fighting fires in oxygen-enriched environments puts our firefighters at risk. The oxygen will allow the fire to spread more quickly. It lowers the temperature at which things catch fire including our protective gear."

The fire was jointly investigated by the Hadley Fire Department, the Hadley Police Department and State Police assigned to the Office of the State Fire Marshal. State Police assigned to Northwestern District Attorney Elizabeth Scheibel's Office also assisted.

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